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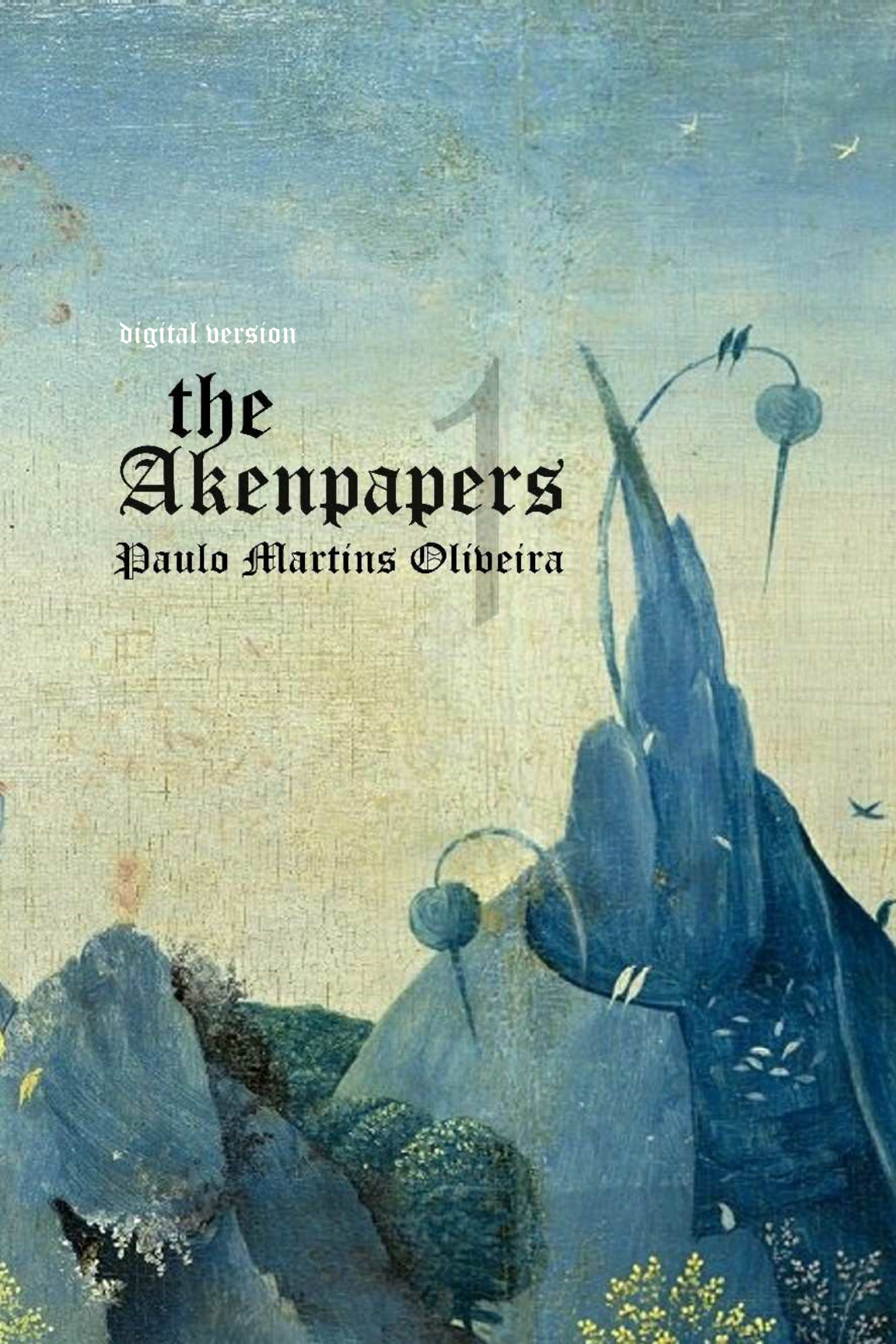
Paulo Martins Oliveira



The Akenpapers 1

Paulo Martins Oliveira

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THE NATIONALIST AND RATIONAL JHERONIMUS BOSCH

Jheronimus Bosch (ca.1450-1516) was indeed one of the most creative minds of all time.

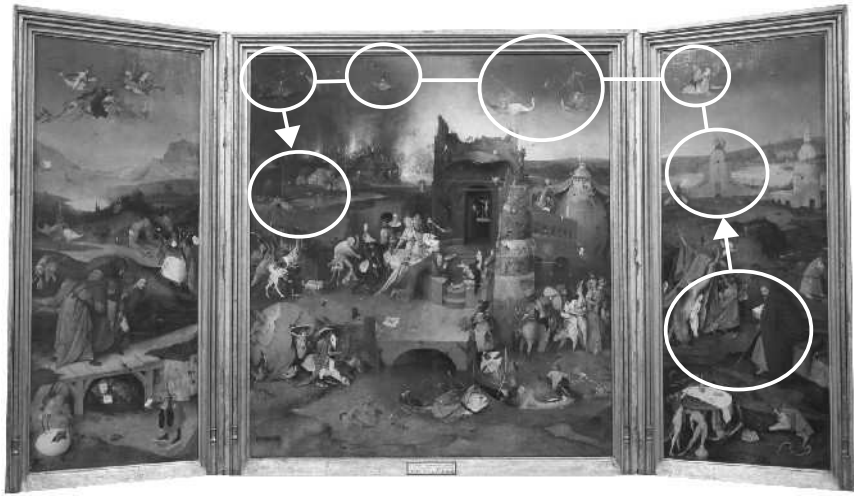
Taking to the limit a dynamic concept explored in the 15th century by Flemish and Italian masters (seizing the potential of oil painting), Bosch created and continually reinvented ambiguous images that combine several issues, highlighting the Dutch national consciousness as a matter of utmost importance.

The artist witnessed the political developments in the independent Duchy of Burgundy, of which his native Burgundian Netherlands had become the true head of the state, constituting the prototype of the modern Netherlands (and even of the Benelux).

Then, after a controversial marriage (1477), the prosperous Dutch and Flemish territories entered the orbit of the great Holy Empire, ruled by the Habsburgs, which led to uprisings, severely repressed by the imperial armies.

However, at the same time, Bosch received well-paid commissions from the new rulers, for which he constantly punished himself in his own paintings, while enciphering severe criticisms about this new political and social context (involving also the Holy See and France, in connivance with the Empire).

The triptych titled *The Temptation of St. Anthony* is a good example of Bosch's messages and artistic method. That work combines a large number of accurate sequences, and this paper addresses one of them, which begins on the right wing, evolving to the left (the "sinister" side).



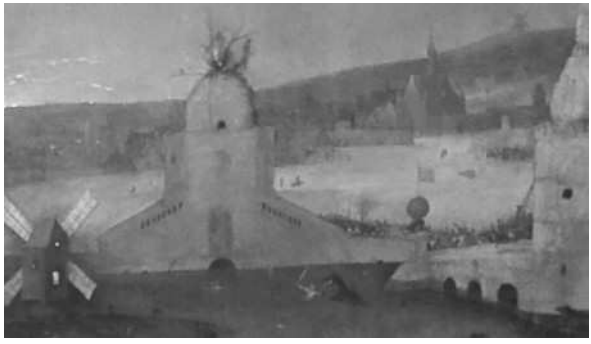
Jheronimus Bosch
The Temptation of St. Anthony (det.)

The loss of a nation

1) The sequence starts by presenting St. Anthony being seduced by a demon queen, who will lead him to Alexandria.

Jheronimus Bosch
The Temptation of St. Anthony (det.)

2) The city of Alexandria is recognizable by its famous lighthouse. However, it presents soldiers guarding its walls, as if the city was being besieged.



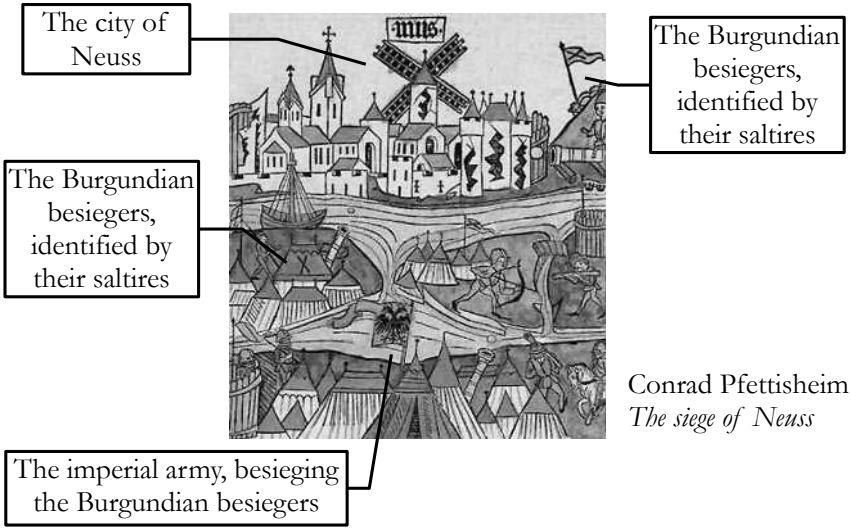
Jheronimus Bosch
The Temptation of St. Anthony (det.)

3) Indeed, in its second layer of meaning, the same image represents the European city of Neuss, besieged in 1475 by the Burgundian-Dutch army, led by Charles the Bold.

This action constituted a decisive episode, which will lead to the loss of independence of the Duchy of Burgundy.

4) The "lighthouse" represents a call for help from Neuss, and the imperial army commanded by Frederick III Habsburg would come to help the resistant city.

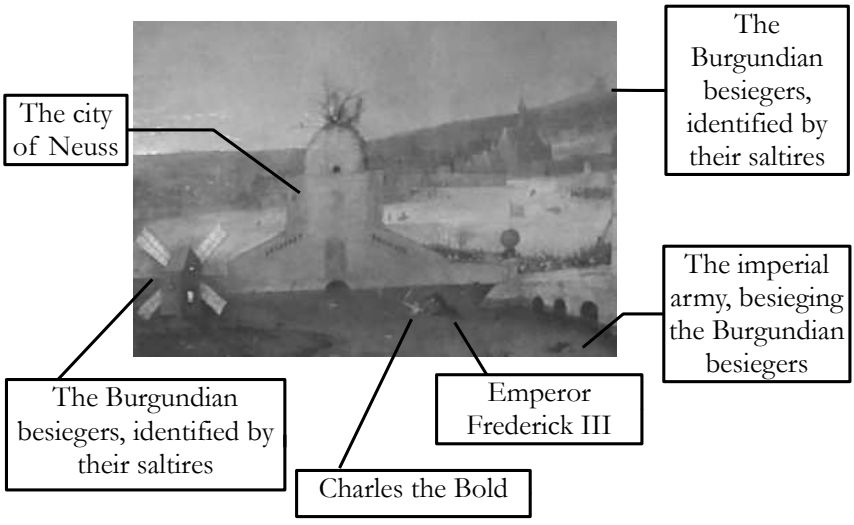
Thereby, the Burgundian besiegers became besieged by the troops of the Holy Emperor. This is represented by an illustration published by Conrad Pfettisheim.



Conrad Pfettisheim
The siege of Neuss

5) In the triptych of *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, Bosch allegorically concealed the same episode.

Charles the Bold is represented by a white soldier, surprised by a black dragon (Emperor Frederick III Habsburg).



6) Seeing himself trapped and with no alternative, Charles the Bold was compelled to agree on a future marriage between his only daughter (Mary of Burgundy) and the imperial heir (Maximilian Habsburg).

7) This marriage could end the independence of the Duchy of Burgundy, and in fact Charles the Bold would die soon, falling in another battle without having a male son. Thereby, that marriage (1477) sealed the destiny of the State, which was ruled from the Burgundian Netherlands.

8) This is encoded by a couple on a fish of sin, flying to the left.

Jheronimus Bosch
The Temptation of St. Anthony (det.)

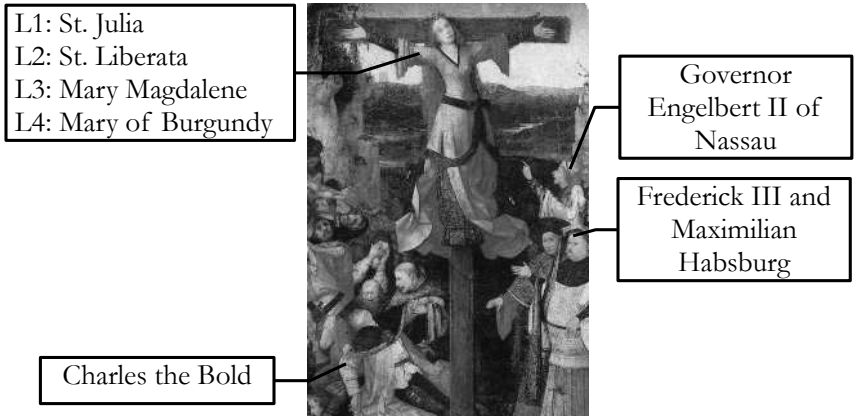
9) That marriage between Mary of Burgundy and Maximilian Habsburg was often considered as a kidnap and a plunder.

Jheronimus Bosch
The Last Judgment (det.)
[frag. of Munich]

Albrecht Dürer
Portrait of Maximilian Habsburg

10) Examples of other variants by Jheronimus Bosch.

Jheronimus Bosch
The Adoration of the Magi (det.)

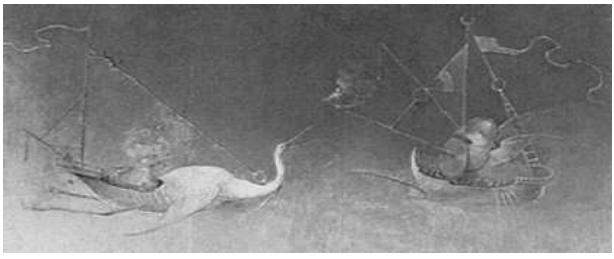


Jheronimus Bosch
Triptych of St. Julia/St. Liberata

11) The tragic figure of Mary of Burgundy was also compared to the biblical Susanna, surprised in her bath by two malicious "elders", now symbolizing Frederick III and his son Maximilian Habsburg.

Rembrandt (17th century)
Susanna and the Elders

12) After the marriage, Maximilian began to impose his power over the new territories, especially the prosperous Burgundian Netherlands, which led to uprisings. This is represented by a courageous spoonbill (the national bird of the Netherlands) facing an armoured battleship.



Jheronimus Bosch
The Temptation of St. Anthony (det.)

13) The armoured vessel symbolizes Maximilian, because he was a famous enthusiast of jousts and armours. Actually, the aforementioned encounter between the spoonbill and the battleship expresses an unbalanced "joust".

Die Deutschen Kaiser
The eccentric Emperor Maximilian Habsburg between his predecessor Frederick III, and his successor Charles V

Jheronimus Bosch
The Garden of Earthly Delights (det.)
Sarcastic depiction of Maximilian as an allie of the Holy See

Pieter Bruegel
The fall of the rebel angels (det.)
The striking memory of Maximilian

14) Maximilian will retain his power, especially after the premature death of Mary of Burgundy (1482), leaving two children of the controversial marriage (Philip the Handsome and Margaret of Austria). This is symbolized by a creature (Maximilian), riding on a egg (his offspring), essential to the Habsburg authority.

Typically and intentionally ambiguous, the "egg" is also a coin, by which Bosch denounces the growing corruption promoted by the imperials with political goals.

Jheronimus Bosch
The Temptation of St. Anthony (det.)

15) At that time it was common the circulation of ancient symbols and images from Egypt and the Middle East, generally associated with paganism and anti-Christianity. That particular image seems to be an adaptation of a well known Persian symbol.

Ahura Mazda
Persian symbol

Jheronimus Bosch
The Garden of Earthly Delights (det.)
Another example: the Egyptian solar disk (Isis) criticized in the *Bible* (representing also the forked oak of Pope Julius II)

16) Maximilian and his demons join those who previously tortured St. Anthony in the skies (first panel of the triptych). Together they burn a resistant city, sparing a contiguous submissive village.

Jheronimus Bosch
The Temptation of St. Anthony (det.)

17) After the "pacification" of the rich Dutch and Flemish territories, the Habsburg army returns to the Holy Empire, which is sarcastically represented by a holy cross on an empty land, on the other side of the river.

Jheronimus Bosch
The Temptation of St. Anthony (det.)

18) The same idea is expressed for instance in the *Garden of Earthly Delights*, where the Habsburg army returns home after having punished the rebellious Burgundian-Dutch, who are represented by a tragic burning saltire on a patriotic windmill.

The imperials are in turn symbolized by an infernal watermill, because they lived upstream of the rivers, especially the large Rhine.

Jheronimus Bosch
The Garden of Earthly Delights (det.)

19) Jheronimus Bosch reinvented this narrative throughout his works, denouncing the corruption promoted by the Habsburgs and their deputies, even in the works commissioned by them.

20) This is the case of the *Garden of Earthly Delights* (commissioned by the governor appointed by the imperials), which presents three layers of meaning, the third dedicated to the mentioned political context.

21) For instance, in the first panel of that triptych, the imperial demons enter the heavenly Burgundian Netherlands, being welcomed by a giant head of Maximilian, crowned with the three of sin.

Jheronimus Bosch
The Garden of Earthly Delights (det.)

22) In the central panel, the Habsburg army reaches the heart of the Burgundian Netherlands by force and corruption. The armoured Maximilian is already there, taking Mary of Burgundy by marriage.

Jheronimus Bosch
The Garden of Earthly Delights (det.)

23) Following very precise symbolic codes, the rest of the central panel (in its third layer) is a satire of the defiled and decadent Burgundian-Dutch elites, increasingly corrupted by the imperials.

Jheronimus Bosch
The Garden of Earthly Delights (det.)

24) The last panel presents the destruction of the nation and the infernal punishment of both the corrupt imperials and the degenerate Burgundian-Dutch, including personal references, concerning the painter himself.

Jheronimus Bosch
The Garden of Earthly Delights (det.)

The crossed influences

In a painting by Bosch, all details have exact and identifiable meanings. Indeed, even the smallest devil isn't random, since its features and props have specific objectives, carefully combined accordingly to the different layers.

Moreover, if it was relatively common for certain painters to superimpose two, three, or even four identities on a single figure, in a particular case Bosch will achieve the merging of ten different characters, each one recognizable and serving various intersecting narratives with "mechanical" precision.

Therefore, the works designed by Jheronimus Bosch, and painted by him always with the assistance of his youngest nephew Anthonis, are complex pieces of symbolic engineering, which resembles clockwork.

When structuring his original narratives, Bosch was inspired by numerous sources, including works of other artists, as was common at the time.

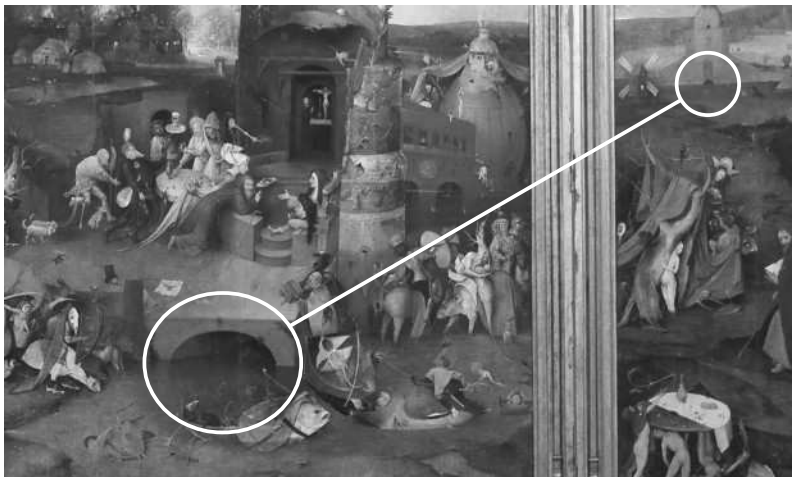
For instance, because the Habsburgs could not subdue the Venetians, Bosch satirized the imperials by placing them in a negative and diabolic version of Venice, with water up to their ankles.

Jheronimus Bosch
The Temptation of St. Anthony (det.)
This image synthetizes the St. Mark's basilica, the palace of the doges, and even the Zodiac Clock installed by the Rainieri family in the late 15th century.

Bosh had indeed travelled to Italy, where he was inspired by Gentile Bellini, who a few years before had created a positive and a negative version of Venice.

Procession in St. Mark's Square
Gentile Bellini
St. Mark preaching in Alexandria

The association between an anti-Venice and Alexandria is also visible in Bosch's *Temptation of St. Anthony*, since it was to that Egyptian city that the saint went, led by the demon queen (first layer).



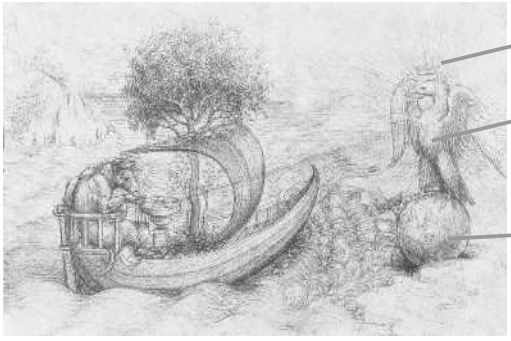
Jheronimus Bosch
The Temptation of St. Anthony (det.)
The exterior of the city in the 2nd wing
of the triptych (Alexandria, in its 1st layer)
corresponds symbolically to the interior
seen in the central panel (also an Anti-Venice,
in another layer of meaning, as said above).

However, on the other hand, Bosch also left a deep influence on the Italian artists of the Renaissance, and even the almost chauvinist Michelangelo Buonarroti honoured him in the Sistine Chapel.

For instance, there are also several links between the works of Bosch and Leonardo. Among other cases, Leonardo's *Allegory with wolf and eagle* was inspired by paintings of the northern artist, and probably was made in his memory, since the drawing is dated to ca.1516.

Jheronimus Bosch
The Ship of Fouls

Jheronimus Bosch
The Garden of Earthly Delights (det.)
The "eagle" represents the Habsburgs, but the "crown" with three legs also symbolizes the French three fleurs-de-lis



Leonardo da Vinci
Allegory with wolf and eagle
The meaning of Leonardo's drawing matchesexactly the specific concerns expressed by Bosch

The "egg" by Bosch is also an imperial globe, adapting a regional proverb

Other variants of the "imperial globe" by Bosch, and later by Bruegel, always with precise meanings:

Conclusion

Throughout the centuries, the works of Jheronimus Bosch became symbols of mystery and madness.

Actually, they are precise and logical constructions that superimpose different issues, of which the national and political consciousness is undoubtedly a matter of major relevance.

So, these pieces of extreme ingenuity constitute a paradigm of rationality, pushing it almost to the limit of its potential.

Jheronimus Bosch
The Garden of Earthly Delights (det.)
One of many symbolic self-portraits of Bosch,
in the second row behind the false three magi
(led by Emperor Maximilian Habsburg)

2012

LEONARDO'S LAST SUPPER
AND THE THREE LAYERS

Introduction

Reflecting a dynamic method consolidated in the 15th century, the *Last Supper* of Leonardo da Vinci is based on the ability to combine narratives and encode messages by using ambiguities and compromise solutions.

Thus, that painting presents three layers of meaning, of which even the first and superficial is actually elaborate.

The first layer of meaning

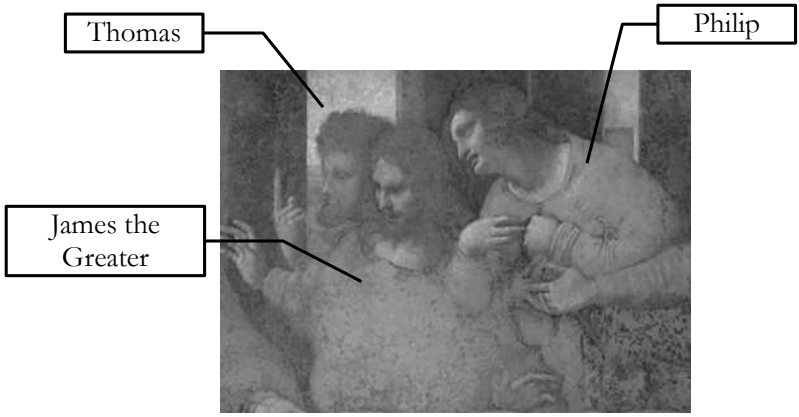
1) Representing much more than the announcement of the treason, the *Last Supper* starts by merging the different events that followed that moment, which are distinctly mentioned in the four Gospels.

1.1) So, the first group on the left represents the initial surprise caused by the announcement (Jn.13:22).

Leonardo da Vinci
The Last Supper (det.)

1.2) Also not implying a direct interaction with Christ, the opposite group represents the discussion about which of the apostles will betray Him (Lk.22:23).

1.3) Then, the disciples asked Him individually, each fearing to be the future traitor (Mt.26:22; Mk. 14:19). This is expressed by the anguished Philip, in the intermediate group on the right.



Leonardo da Vinci
The Last Supper (det.)

1.4) Next, the disciples began to argue again, but now about which of them was the most important (Lk.22:24). This is symbolized by the presumption of the censurable Thomas.

1.5) Standing between them, James the Greater opens his arms and tries to protect Christ from such anxiety (his posture will be instrumental for the second layer of meaning).

1.6) In the other intermediate group, Peter calls John and asks him to question Jesus about the identity of the mysterious traitor (Jn. 13:24).

Leonardo da Vinci
The Last Supper (det.)

1.7) Peter holds a knife that symbolizes his temper, because he will hurt a guard soon after the meal (Jn.18:10).

1.8) Showing a guilty look, Judas cannot resist stealing some bread, for he already was corrupt and a thief (Jn.12:6). Moreover, it would be through bread that Judas will reveal himself as the future traitor (Mk.14:20; Jn.13:26).

The second layer of meaning

2) This superimposed narrative continues the previous and presents the tragic destiny of Christ.

2.1) Firstly, the attitude of Peter is deliberately ambiguous and dubious. On the one hand, it suggests aggressiveness, for Peter was jealous of John (Jn.21:20-22), who was Christ's favourite disciple.

2.2) But on the other hand, Peter bows to John, in a strange reverential posture. This is due to the fact that the figure of "John" also represents the Virgin Mary.

Leonardo da Vinci
The Last Supper (det.)

Sandro Botticelli
The Adoration of the Magi (det.)

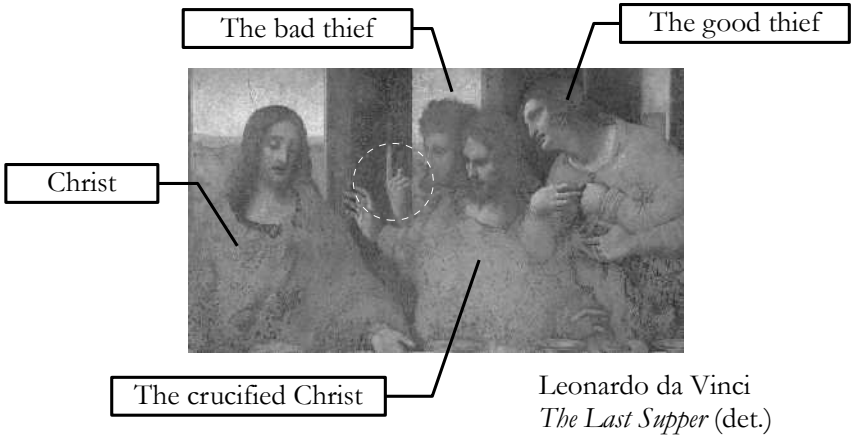
2.3) Indeed, at that time several artists usually merged different identities into a single figure, by using compromise solutions. In this case, Leonardo combined the Virgin Mary and John because this apostle was chosen to take care for the Virgin, as decided by the agonizing Christ (Jn.19:26-27).

2.4) Because the crucifixion is a key element in this layer, the same composite character represents Mary Magdalene, synthesizing the three main figures who stood near Christ when he died.

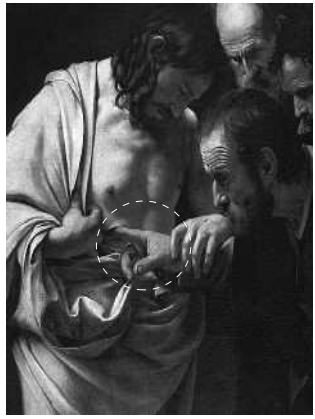
Some examples of composite figures

2.5) So, leaving an empty space in between, Christ moves away from that allegorical character (who represents His most loved ones), and approaches James the Greater, who symbolizes the crucified Jesus, flanked by the two "thieves".

2.6) Philip and Thomas are presented as thieves because somehow they had doubted Christ (Jn.14:8-14, 20:24-29), but only the "bad thief" Thomas insisted on proof.

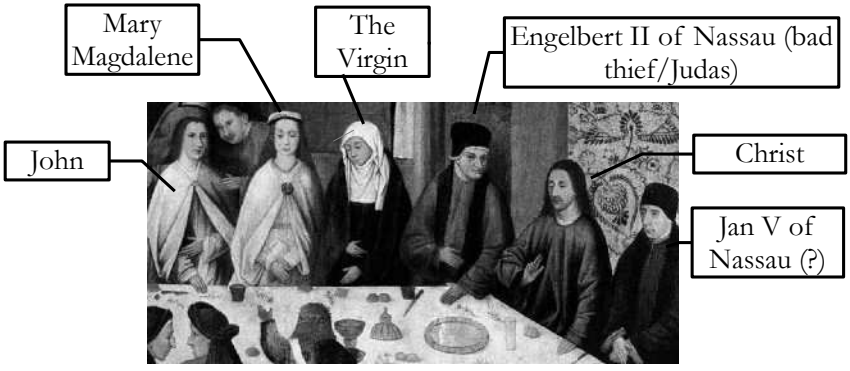


Leonardo da Vinci
The Last Supper (det.)



Caravaggio
The incredulity of St. Thomas (det.)
The double meaning of the finger
(presumption and doubt)

2.7) There are other variants regarding the same issue:



Jheronimus Bosch
The Marriage Feast at Cana (det.) [copy of Rotterdam]

This complex work also veils an alternative Last Supper. Here, John, Magdalene, and the Virgin are individualized from each other, while Jesus is separated and flanked by the two "thieves" (Bosch's contemptible clients, who thought they were being honoured). There are several and clear connections between different works of Jheronimus Bosch and of Leonardo, but since this in particular is a copy, it is impossible to determine if Bosch influenced the Italian, or vice versa.

2.8) Another interesting example was developed by Caravaggio:

Caravaggio
The Supper at Emmaus

The good thief is a more complex figure, made of several layers

The bad thief is the maverick Michelangelo Buonarroti, next to Michelangelo da Caravaggio

In this elaborate painting, Christ is flanked by a good thief ("crucified" like He was), and a bad thief (with his arms behind the crossbeam, in a common variant of the crucifixion of the thieves).

Michelangelo Buonarroti
by Bonasone

Rembrandt
The Lamentation
(Christ and the thieves)

Christ

2.9) In Milan, the path to crucifixion is confirmed on the opposite side of Leonardo's *Last Supper*, by a painting of Donato Montorfano (these relations between opposite walls were common in Italy).

Donato Montorfano
The Crucifixion

The third layer

3.) This is the most complex and deep narrative, integrating strong criticisms about the "Church of Peter", at that time ruled by Pope Alexander VI (Rodrigo Borgia).

3.1) In this third layer, the composite figure next to Peter represents specifically Mary Magdalene, expressing the human dimension of Christ, valued by the humanists as a symbol of proximity to Mankind.

3.2) Since it was now impossible to use the obvious satirical Pope Joan, the humanists turned directly and indirectly to the ambiguous St. Mary Magdalene, in order to encode their perspectives and criticism.

3.3) In contrast to that peaceful composite figure, Peter and his knife represent here the repression and the desire for control by the Inquisition.

The coat of arms
of the Inquisition

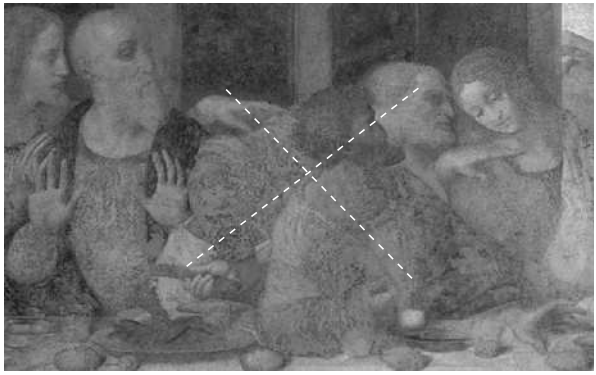
3.4) Distancing himself, Andrew (Peter's humble brother) expresses the positive side of the Church, often connoted with the Franciscan Order.

Leonardo da Vinci
The Last Supper (det.)

Depictions of St. Francis
receiving the stigmata (examples)

3.5) Andrew is traditionally symbolized by a saltire, which became a surreptitious expression of intellectual autonomy and criticism, contrasting with the (decadent) crossed golden and silver keys of Peter (the papacy).

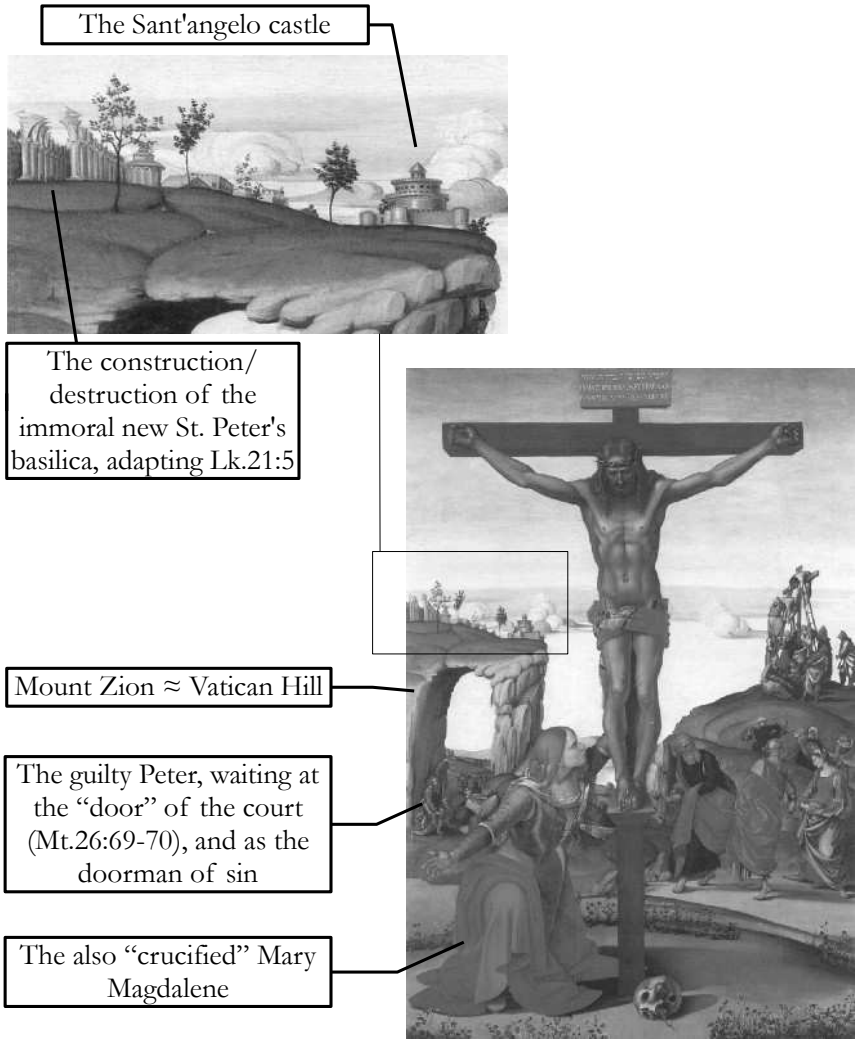
3.6) It is visible that the bodies of Peter and Judas draw a saltire, denouncing the great sins of the high clergy of the Renaissance: the repression (the knife); the corruption (the purse of Judas); and the lust (the ambiguous gesture towards Mary Magdalene).



Leonardo da Vinci
The Last Supper (det.)

In the copy of the *The Last Supper* by Giampietrino (Leonardo's disciple), it is clearly visible that the purse of Judas has elements resembling two keys.

3.7) Indeed, it was by its resourceful ambiguities and multiple meanings that Leonardo's *Last Supper* was considered an important reference among the artists of that time, such as Luca Signorelli, who adapted and developed some concepts.



Luca Signorelli
Crucifixion with Mary Magdalene

3.8) Nevertheless, it was one of Leonardo's greatest rivals, Michelangelo Buonarroti, who defiantly sought inspiration in the *Last Supper*, in order to overcome Leonardo and to encode the greatest criticism of the high clergy.

3.9) Later, Daniele Crespi would merge the work of Leonardo and the autonomous adaptation of Michelangelo.

Daniele Crespi
The Last Supper (det.)

3.10) Other details support the interpretations here presented, such as the progression from shadow (earthly life) to light (redemptive death, eternal life), etc.

Conclusion

In fact, ingenious works such as the *Last Supper* were intellectual assertions and competitive creations among the humanist community, as well as veiled expressions of the beliefs of those free-thinkers.

Leonardo da Vinci
The Last Supper

2012

REMBRANDT AND THE ART OF COMPROMISE

There are several reasons to admire the art of the Dutch painter Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669).

One of them, perhaps the most elusive, lies in the ability to create ambiguous images, which synthesize different issues through the management of compromise solutions, following the earlier examples of other Dutch and Flemish masters, as well as from Italy and other countries.

About Rembrandt's skills, an illustrative example can be seen in *The Storm on the Sea of Galilee* (1633), in which is depicted a biblical scene (Mk.4:35-41).

To decipher the real meaning of this picture, it is necessary to take into account that the Netherlands were then battling for their independence.

For this greater cause, both the Dutch Protestants and the Catholics should overcome their differences and work together, fighting side by side against the Spaniards.

The storm represents the war, and the boat is actually an allegorical composition, which blends two smaller boats sailing in opposite directions (the Dutch Protestants and Catholics).

Ambiguously, they have a common rudder and share the same mast, which is strategically placed between the boats, having two autonomous sails. Its base is hidden by the breaking waves, and at its top the mast forms the cross of Christ, i.e. the common reference that aggregates the several ropes linking the two boats.

Like the flag above, also a rope with a subdivided tip flutters in the wind, underlining the same message.

This idea of alliance was elegantly inserted by Rembrandt in other works, such as the paining usually known as *The Night Watch* (Amsterdam), which actually celebrates the common effort of the Dutch in defending their country.

Detail of the *Night Watch*, or *The Company of Captain Frans Banning Cocq and Lieutenant Willem van Ruytenburch*.
In addition, a Catholic leader (in yellow) supporting the Protestant commander (in black).

The bright woman holds the symbols of the Arquebusiers. Beyond that, she is Saskia (Rembrandt's wife), representing the rich and prosperous homeland, which must be defended by all Dutch.

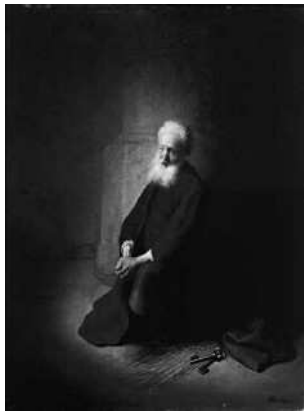
On the opposite side, the darkened and frightened dog symbolizes the Spanish Habsburgs. Since Jheronimus Bosch, the dog systematically represents the Habsburgs in the Netherlands.

The same concern for unity between Protestants and Catholics is clearly visible in the painting *Two Old Men Disputing* (Melbourne), which indeed represents St. Peter and St. Paul, always arguing, yet complementary.

Rembrandt
Two Old Men Disputing [*Peter and Paul*]
St. Peter is a key reference for Catholics, as St. Paul is for Protestants. With his particular sense of humour, Rembrandt depicted St. Peter in a "papal throne", trying to lecture St. Paul.

If separated, both St. Paul (the Dutch Protestants), and St. Peter (the Dutch Catholics) will face same destiny: the subjugation.

Rembrandt
St. Paul in Prison
(Stuttgart)



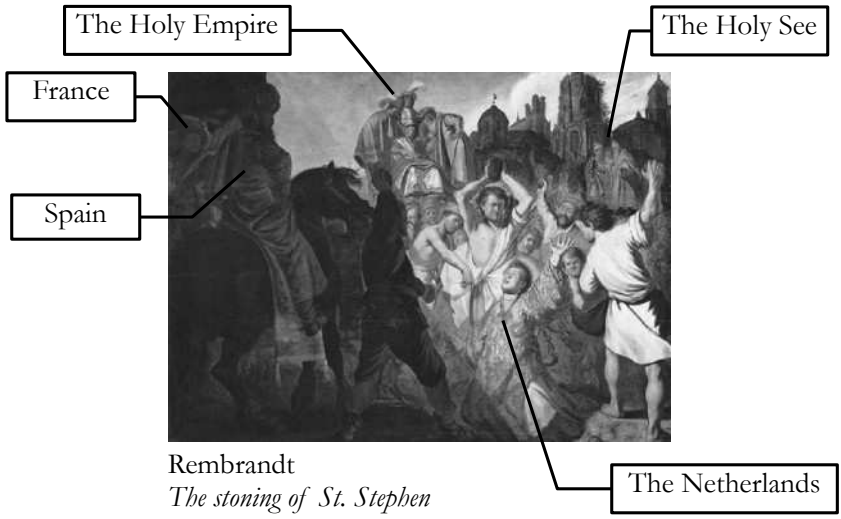
Rembrandt
St. Peter in Prison
(Jerusalem)

By this way, Rembrandt consistently expressed the need for communion, which lacked in the past, as can be seen in the works of Pieter Bruegel, in the previous century.

Pieter Bruegel
Detail from the *Fight between Carnival and Lent* (Vienna), satirizing the internal conflicts between Dutch Protestants and Dutch Catholics (16th century).
.

Rembrandt is deeply nationalist, and one can find numerous allegorical references throughout his works.

Expressing the defeats and hardships (examples):



Rembrandt
The stoning of St. Stephen
(Lyon)

Rembrandt
Jeremiah lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem
(Amsterdam)

Expressing the revival of the nationalistic enthusiasm and hope (examples):

Rembrandt
The raising of Lazarus
(Los Angeles)
After some important defeats, such as the loss of Breda to the Spanish troops (1625), in the 30s the Dutch nationalists recovered their impetus in a decisive manner.

Rembrandt
Belshazzar's Feast
(London)

The hairstyle forms the head of a Dutch lion.

Most likely, the supposed Jewish writing composes a Dutch nationalist message

The Babylonian king represents the Spanish monarch.

The left cup was slightly deformed to represent the head of a dog (the Habsburgs).

The circle is a traditional artistic symbol of the unwanted union with Spain (often used by Bruegel, for instance).

As seen, there are symmetrical connections between the two sides of the picture, as well as hierarchical relations on each side, valuing the Dutch elements.

In fact, the nationalist issue is a matter of utmost importance to the artist, who instead of obvious and direct depictions opted for more elaborate creations, challenging the viewer to interpret his designs.

But besides these great political causes, also in more everyday issues Rembrandt used the same ability to find ingenious compromise solutions.

This is the case of *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp* (The Hague), originally commissioned for the Amsterdam Guild of Surgeons.

Rembrandt
The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp

In this picture, Dr. Tulp performs a dissection of a human body, but the portrayed audience is not constituted by inexperienced students, but fellow colleagues and prominent figures of the city.

Therefore Rembrandt had to be skilled in managing sensitivities, like Nicolaes Eliaszoon Pickenoy in the past, who in 1619 painted the precedent picture of this kind for the Guild, titled *The Osteology Lesson of Dr. Sebastiaen Egbertsz* (Amsterdam).

Nicolaes Eliaszoon Pickenoy
The Osteology Lesson of Dr. Sebastiaen Egbertsz

Actually, this earlier work doesn't even resemble a lesson, and because of that the subsequent painting, now by Rembrandt, stands out even more for its audacity and ingenuity.

Thus, Rembrandt depicted Dr. Tulp as a teacher, but not only he isn't looking at anyone, but also no one is actually looking neither at Dr. Tulp, nor at the corpse, as demonstrated by a careful analysis of the directions of the gazes.

So, there is depicted a teacher, but no one is being lectured.

This is just another example of the broad resources of Rembrandt, whose creations should be considered in a dynamic perspective.

2012

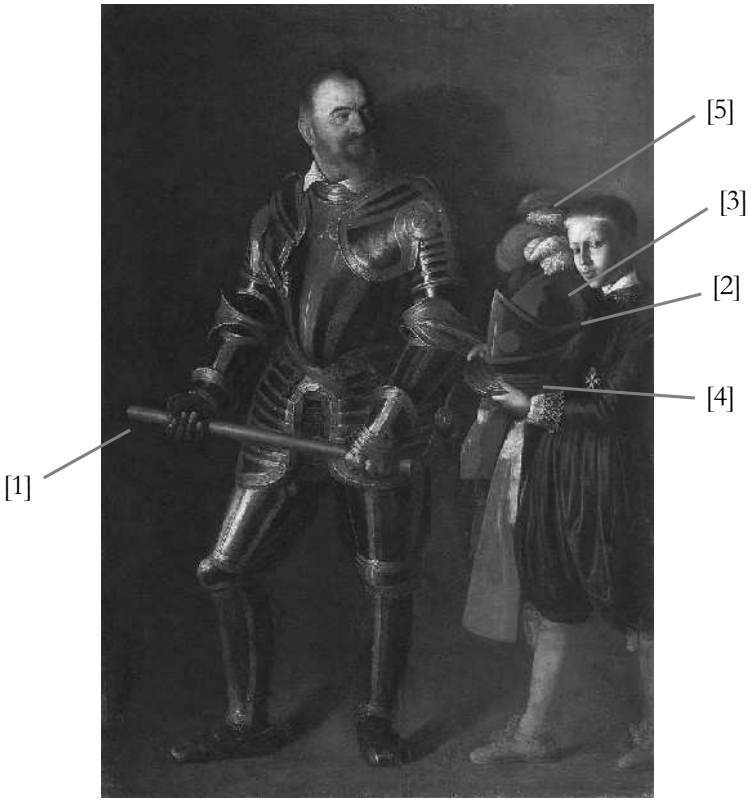
Deconstructing Caravaggio and Velázquez

Caravaggio (1571-1610)

The use of superimposed layers of meaning had been evolving significantly since the 15th century, and one of the major contributors would be Michelangelo da Caravaggio, who employed different methods to create particularly elaborate paintings.

One of those solutions was the deconstruction of elements, which can be exemplified by one of his simplest but always ingenious works, titled *The portrait of Alof of Wignacourt* (Louvre).

Supposedly, Caravaggio depicted a great military commander, but on a deeper level he portrayed an executioner.



Caravaggio
The portrait of Alof of Wignacourt

So, Alof holds the staff of command as if it was an axe [1], and its (deconstructed) blade [2] is in the helmet [3], which in turn symbolizes a decapitated head on a plate [4].

Even the feathers [5] of the helmet are "tongues" insultingly directed at the armoured man, expressing Caravaggio's true opinion about him.

This kind of device was used by the same painter to design more complex works, such as *The sacrifice of Isaac* (Uffizi), which actually conceals a completely different narrative.

Caravaggio
The sacrifice of Isaac

(det.)

Indeed, this image functions as a frame of a sequence, containing deconstructed elements that allow to decode the antecedents and the conclusion of the superimposed story[1].

Thus, deepening an already protean concept of art, Caravaggio became a reference for a new generation of painters.

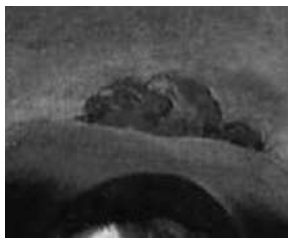
[1] Besides the deconstruction, Caravaggio also used other devices, such as the deformation. For instance, a closer look reveals that the arm of the supposed Isaac was artificially bent, in order to also hold the knife (sharing the hand of the older character. The connection is strategically hidden by the hand of the supposed angel). This acts as a frame inside another frame, and allows to read the underlying narrative.

Diego Velázquez (1599-1660)

Profoundly influenced by the works of Caravaggio (as well as of Botticelli and others), the Spanish painter Diego Velázquez also created elaborate works, such as *The portrait of Prince Balthasar with a dwarf* (Museum of Fine Arts of Boston).

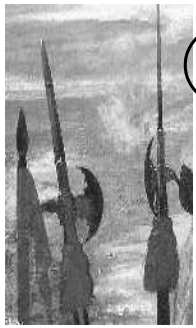
Velázquez
The Portrait of Prince Balthasar with a dwarf

In this painting Balthasar symbolizes his own father, King Philip IV of Spain, while the "dwarf" represents the Count-Duke of Olivares, who actually was running the country, reason why he holds the "sceptre" and the imperial "orb".



The Count-Duke of Olivares
"crowned" with a concealed vulture,
also by Velázquez

Particularly interesting is the pillow with the supposed hat on the right. Here Velázquez shows how he deconstructed some elements across different works, for in reality he depicted the axe of a halberd, as seen in *The surrender of Breda* (Prado).



Velázquez
The surrender of Breda

The feathers of the hat form the suggestion of a head of a dog (caricature), which was a traditional sarcastic symbol of the Habsburg/Spanish domination in the Netherlands, and in fact, throughout several of his paintings, Diego Velázquez consistently presented his opinion about the ongoing war in the Dutch territories.

In conclusion these few examples demonstrate the great versatility of this kind of multi-layered art, whose analysis requires different types of approach.

2012

THE (DIABOLIC) OAK OF THE ROVERE POPES

Despite belonging to the same family of the spoonbill, the ibis has a negative connotation in the symbolic grammar of Jheronimus Bosch, representing the corrupt.

In the triptych titled *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, the artist depicted a skater ibis, made of compromise solutions, since it combines three layers of meaning.

This paper starts by addressing one of that layers, which expresses the criticism aimed at the papacy of Julius II, who was from the Italian family of the Rovere (oak, in English).

Thus, representing this controversial and ambitious Pope, the ibis has a funnel on its head, which in this layer symbolizes a papal crown (tiara), having inserted in it a twig that alludes to the forked oak in the coat of arms of the "Warrior Pope", also known as "il Terrible".

The coat of arms of
the Rovere Popes
Sixtus IV: 1471-1483
Julius II: 1503-1513

Jheronimus Bosch
The Temptation of St. Anthony (det.)

The document in the beak is related to this issue, because it contains a written riddle, as was common at that time. In this case, the word should be read from right to left:

g / i / u / l / i / o (Italian for Julius)

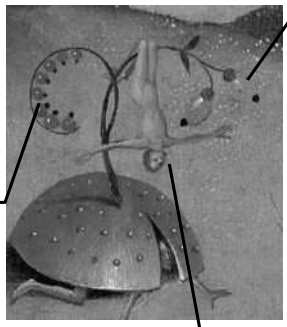
The " l " is forked, which helps to disguise the solution, but also symbolizes the papal oak, points this Julius as the II, and demonizes him. Moreover, that forked " l " represents the Greek letter Tau, in an autonomous layer.

Jheronimus Bosch
The Temptation of St. Anthony (det.)

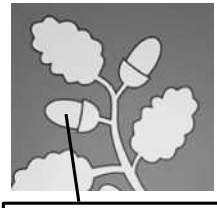
During the governments of the Rovere Popes (Sixtus IV and Julius II), several artists encoded denunciations using specific, related symbols such as forked elements and acorns, for instance.

Examples from the Garden of Earthly Delights (Jheronimus Bosch)

The Egyptian solar disk (Isis) also symbolizes the papal forked tree.



Symbolic acorns



Oranges, in an autonomous criticism concerning the Medici

Acorns in the papal coat of arms

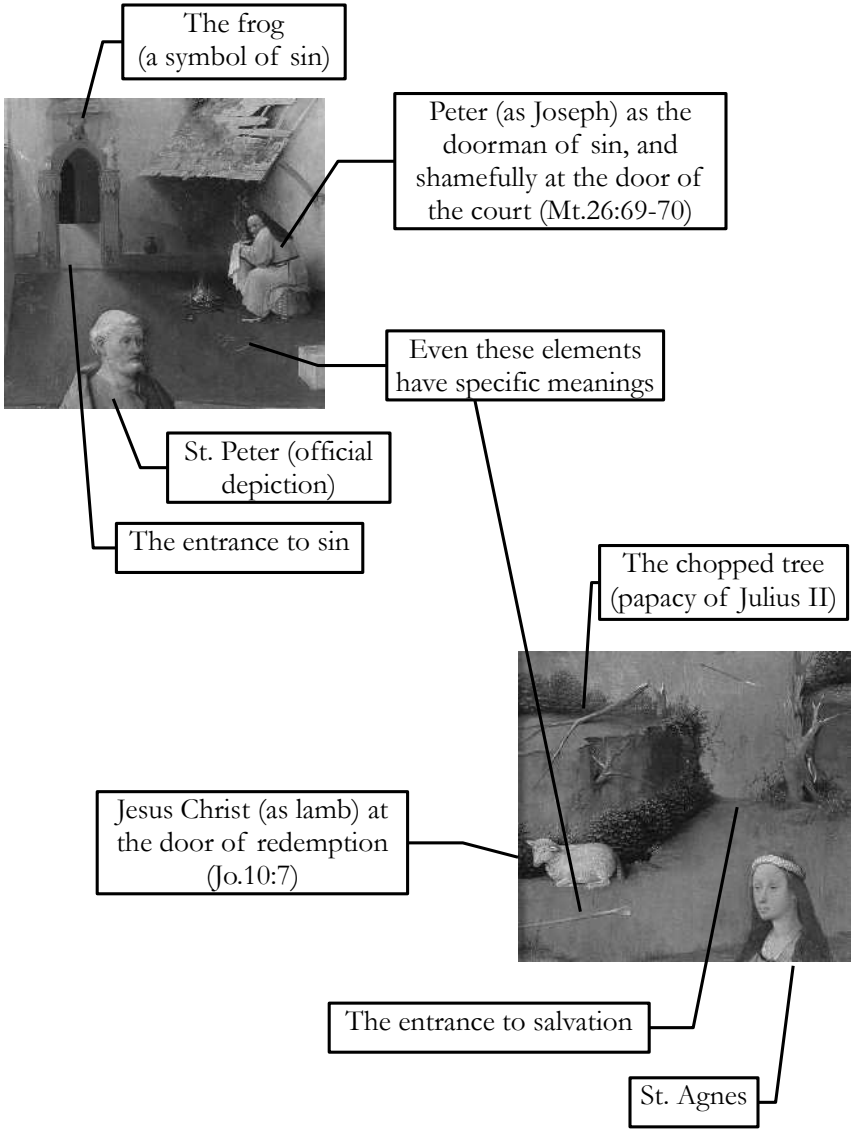
"Peter" (the popes) crucified upside down on a stylized forked tree

Sandro Botticelli
The Punishment of Korah (det.)

The two figures draw the forked oak of Pope Sixtus IV. Symbolizing the tense relationship between the Medici and the Rovere, the complex meaning of this fresco is presented elsewhere.

Examples from the *Adoration of the Magi* (Jheronimus Bosch)

The symmetric connections between the side panels

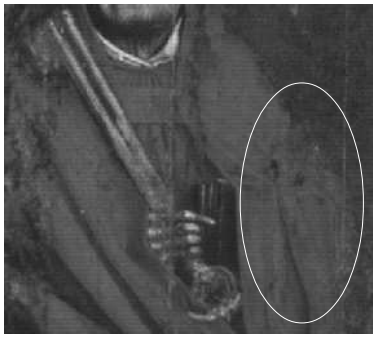


Peter symbolizes here the lust of the high clergy of the Renaissance. Considering Bosch's peculiar sense of humour, the open book is probably a defense, and one can anticipate a painful end.

In the central panel, the "stable" represents the decadent Vatican, including the dungeons of the Inquisition.

Example from the *Lisbon Altarpiece* (Nuno Gonçalves)

St. Peter



(det.)

The two keys are actually just one (forked), supposedly honouring the Rovere Pope Sixtus IV.

The addition of a cat-demon reinforces the satire.

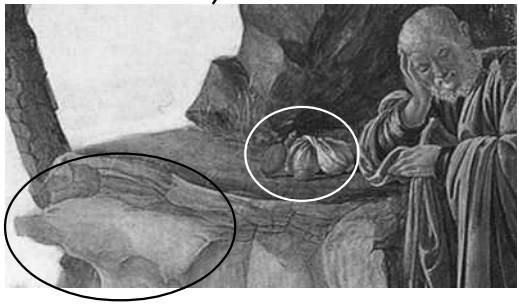
The skeletal "glove" discreetly suggests the presence of Death.

Examples from the *Adoration of the Magi* (Sandro Botticelli)

Pope Sixtus IV

Cosimo de Medici (rev.)

Sarcastic forked trees



The wolf is a traditional pejorative symbol of the papacy.

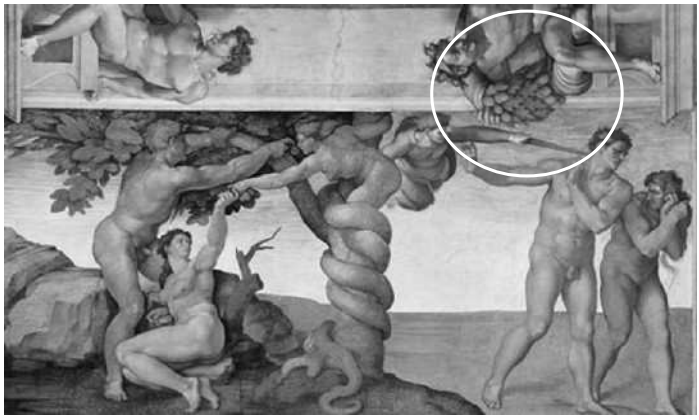
The figure of Joseph was often used to conceal criticisms regarding Peter (the papacy). In this case, the objects represent his genitalia (the lust of the high clergy).

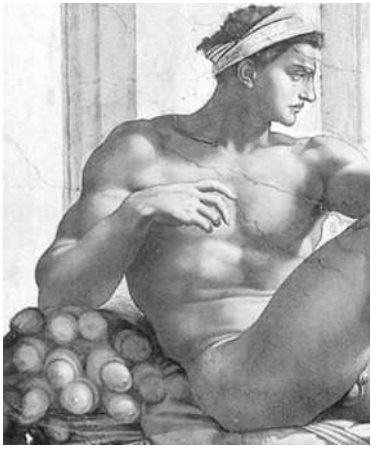
Example from the *Madonna of the Meadow* (Giovanni Bellini)

Alluding to Julius II, the forked
trees form the letters VA = Vaticano, Vatican
(the letters T, I, C, N and even O are also there).
The black eagle underlines the satire.

Examples from the Sistine Chapel (Michelangelo)

The acorns of Julius II subtly introduced in the (forked) tree of sin.





A suspicious depiction of acorns, possiby with a sexual connotation.

Examples from the *Portrait of Julius II* (Raphael)

The acorn on the left reflects a long I (Iulius, in latin), and two bleeding wounds (II)

The throne is also a forked oak with the acorns. The one on the right has a detailed shape of a nipple, denouncing the lust of the high clergy.

The sinister bearded "face" indicates the true nature of Julius II, contradicting the merciful portrait of *il Terrible*.

The crossed keys form a denunciatory saltire, and also crossed bones, presenting the papacy as a symbol of death.

The large "vagina" presents the papacy of the Renaissance as a great prostitute.
The same concept by Caravaggio: Jesus plays the role of Martha, lecturing a sarcastic version of Mary Magdalene (Peter as a prostitute).

The handkerchief is a decapitated head. The rings suggest the opulence of the Holy See. The absence of rings in the middle finger may contain an additional satire.

About these devices, there was even a competition between Michelangelo and Raphael, each one trying to be the most audacious. Raphael would die in 1520, and a few years later Michelangelo ended all doubts with his *Last Judgment*, in the very heart of the "Church of Peter".

Thus, by using numerous ingenious artifices, several artists managed to express their criticism regarding the high clergy and its Inquisition, here represented by the Rovere Popes.

In a wider scope, the presented examples demonstrate the versatility of the artistic method developed in those centuries, based on ambiguities and in the ability to associate and conceal messages, which ultimately were declarations of free thought.

2012